

# Major Findings #1

## Substance Abuse Prevention Programs Reduce Rates of Substance Use

CSAP's National Cross-Site Evaluation of High-Risk Youth Programs found reductions in rates<sup>1</sup> of substance use by youth participating in a CSAP-funded prevention program as compared to comparison youth who had limited opportunity to participate in prevention programs in their community.

**Thirty-day Substance Use** combines use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana to assess overall change in adolescent substance use for the three most widely used substances in this population. Substance use for participants in CSAP prevention programs was 12 percent less at exit than comparison youth, and 6 percent below comparison youth 18 months later. In addition, programs produced lasting reductions in the rates of use of individual substances.

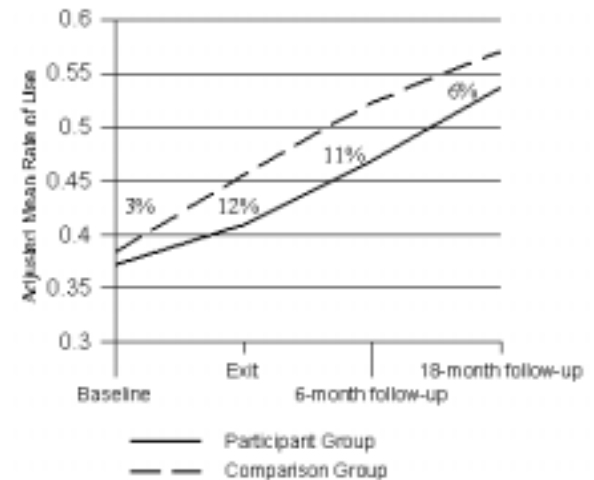
**Thirty-day Cigarette Use.** Although cigarette prevention is a well-developed field independent of alcohol, marijuana, and illicit drug prevention, program participants averaged 7 percent lower use rates than comparison youth over the 3 points in time when outcomes were measured.

**Thirty-day Alcohol Use.** Alcohol use was the most widespread focal topic of substance use prevention in Cross-Site programs. Alcohol is used more easily and more prevalently than any drug in the study. Study programs produced statistically significant reductions in alcohol use rates for participants relative to comparison youth. Participant use rates were an average of 11 percent lower than those of comparison youth over the 18 months following the end of the program. Unlike cigarettes and marijuana, the reductions in alcohol use faded at the 18-month measurement point.

**Thirty-day Marijuana Use.** Marijuana use initiates at a later age than alcohol but rises extremely rapidly, particularly among males. Marijuana use is becoming a major concern in prevention as its use proliferates, but its development and patterns of use are less understood than for alcohol. The study programs produced statistically significant and lasting reductions in the rate of marijuana use by program participants relative to comparison youth. Program participants averaged a consistent 11 percent below comparison youth rates of marijuana use at program exit and 6 and 18 months after exit.

**Other Positive Outcomes.** More than one-fourth (26%) of the programs had a meaningful positive effect<sup>2</sup> on the school connectedness of participant youth relative to comparison youth who had little opportunity to participate in prevention programs in the community. This protective factor has been identified as a particularly important influence on substance use in this study and other prevention research. Programs that were delivered in school tended to be more effective with respect to this important protective factor. Encouraging less accepting attitudes toward substance use was an objective for many study programs, and 26 percent of the programs produced a meaningful increase in nonaccepting attitudes toward substance use among participants relative to comparison youth. However, the evaluation found that programs that produced attitude change were no more likely to produce change in substance use behavior, suggesting that prevention programs should not focus only on attitude change.

Trends in 30-Day Substance Use  
For Participant And Comparison Youth  
(n = 5,195)



**Note:** Calculated for the 23 sites with low comparison group exposure to prevention programs.

<sup>1</sup> Rates are measured in terms of the number of days in which a substance was used in the last 30 days; the numbers of days are combined across cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana to calculate the substance use rate.

<sup>2</sup> For this analysis, a meaningful positive impact is defined by the conventional standard of a standardized difference in average change between participant and comparison youth (effect size) greater than .20.